

Thursday 11/19/20

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pentagon Praises Record UK Defense Budget Hike, Urges Other 'Free Nations' to Follow Suit by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The British military is Washington's primary partner in some of its most important missions around the globe, and London's planned exit from the European Union is likely to push the two nations even closer.

The new acting Pentagon chief hailed London's decision to "significantly increase defense spending", saying it sets an example for other US allies. The United Kingdom is already the second-highest defense spender in the NATO alliance, after the United States.

"The UK is our most stalwart and capable ally, and this increase in spending is indicative of their commitment to NATO and our shared security. With this increase, the UK military will continue to be one of the finest fighting forces in the world. Their commitment to increased defense funding should be a message to all free nations that the most capable among us can – and must - do more to counter emerging threats to our shared freedoms and security," acting Pentagon chief Christopher C. Miller [said in a statement](#) Wednesday.

The development comes as UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Wednesday a defense spending increase, the largest for the island nation since the end of Cold War. [Over the next four years, an additional £16.5 billion](#) (\$21.9 billion) will be dedicated to a slew of new advanced projects, including new warships, [the Tempest future combat air program](#), and the establishment of a "cyber force" and [a British space command to rival the US Space Force](#), alongside a hefty investment in research.

"For decades, the UK government has pared and trimmed our defense budget [...] I have refused to pick up the scalpel yet again," [Johnson told Parliament remotely from quarantine](#) induced by COVID-19 exposure. "I have taken this decision in the teeth of the pandemic because the defense of the realm must come first."

"The international situation is more perilous and more intensely competitive than at any time since the Cold War and Britain must be true to our history and stand alongside our allies. To achieve this, we need to upgrade our capabilities across the board," he added.

Johnson's new pledge, which amounts to about £4 billion per year, will swell the defense budget by over 10%.

Third of Member States Still Fail to Meet Defence Spending Target, NATO Says

In October, [the NATO alliance published its annual report](#) on the defense spending of each of its 30 member states, revealing that just one-third of the pact's signatories are actually meeting their pledged budget goal of 2% of gross domestic product. Meeting the goal has become a major concern for the administration of US President Donald Trump, [who has promised to punish member states such as Germany](#) that have failed to meet that goal, which is claimed to cause the US an extra burden.

With its colossal defense budget that dwarfs the rest of the globe's, the United States takes the top spot, spending 3.87% of its GDP on the military. The United Kingdom is a distant second-place, in terms of the raw monetary amount, but is outpaced in terms of GDP percentage dedicated to defense by Greece, which spent 2.58% of its GDP on its military in fiscal year 2020.

The British military is involved in much of the efforts of the US military around the globe, [including the coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria](#), and Washington's efforts to prevent China from establishing control over islands in the South China Sea. The recent commissioning of the UK's largest-ever warship, the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, is a major part of that effort, and [its first official patrol is expected to be close](#) to Chinese shores.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Twitter Trolls Rudy Giuliani as 'Hair Dye' Streaks Down His Face While Alleging Voter Fraud

Former New York City mayor and current campaign lawyer for US President Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, held a press conference on Thursday alleging that what he claimed was voter fraud during the 2020 presidential election was a nationally coordinated effort.

During a press conference on Thursday, Giuliani attempted to lay out a case for allegations of voter fraud during the 2020 US presidential election, becoming highly animated while speaking to reporters.

"I don't know what you need to wake you up, to do your job and inform the American people, whether you like it or not, of the things they need to know!" Giuliani yelled at reporters, [the Daily Beast reported](#). "This is real! It's not made up! There's no one here who engages in fantasies." In addition, Giuliani claimed that the alleged fraud was nationally coordinated.

"It's not a singular voter fraud in one state," Giuliani declared, speaking at the Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington DC, [NBC reported](#). "This pattern repeats itself in a number of states, almost exactly the same pattern, which any experienced investigator prosecutor, which suggests that there was a plan — from a centralized place to execute these various acts of voter fraud, specifically focused on big cities, and specifically focused on, as you would imagine, big cities controlled by Democrats, and particularly if they focused on big cities that have a long history of corruption."

Throughout the conference, Giuliani sweated profusely, repeatedly wiping his brow.

As black hair dye dripped down Giuliani's face, staining his cheeks, netizens on Twitter were quick to poke fun at the struggling lawyer.

"It appears that Rudy Giuliani is sweating through his hair dye," [one Twitter account pointed out](#). "BREAKING: Rudy Giuliani's hair dye," [another joked](#).

"Hey @RudyGiuliani - pls call me for some free tips on stopping hair dye leaks," [a third tweeted](#). Following the presidential election, Trump and his GOP allies quickly filed at least 22 election-related lawsuits after US media projected a Joe Biden victory.

On Thursday, however, the Trump campaign announced that it had withdrawn one of its lawsuits, in Michigan, after claiming that it had achieved its goal of ensuring that every vote had been counted.

"This morning we are withdrawing our lawsuit in Michigan as a direct result of achieving the relief we sought: to stop the election in Wayne County from being prematurely certified before residents can be assured that every legal vote has been counted and every illegal vote has not been counted," Giuliani said, as reported by [Fox News](#).

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

BuzzFeed to Buy HuffPost in Stock Deal With Verizon Media

HuffPost is a US news aggregator and blog, formerly known as The Huffington Post until 2017. The site, sometimes abbreviated further as HuffPo, was acquired by Verizon Media, a unit of Verizon Communications, in 2015.

In an [official statement](#), Verizon Media revealed on Thursday that BuzzFeed Inc. has agreed to acquire HuffPost in a stock deal, a decision expected to boost the growth of both digital media outlets. The new acquisition is part of a larger deal between BuzzFeed and Verizon Media.

"Verizon Media and BuzzFeed today announced a new strategic partnership across content and advertising, the acquisition of HuffPost by BuzzFeed, and an investment that will make Verizon Media a minority shareholder in BuzzFeed. From powering new consumer shopping experiences, to content syndication, to innovative ad products, the partnership will unlock new revenue opportunities for both media companies. The addition of HuffPost - which BuzzFeed will acquire - brings BuzzFeed a universally known brand with significant scale, and an audience complementary to its own," the statement reads.

Under the larger deal, the companies will syndicate content on their platforms and seek joint advertising opportunities as the deal will allow BuzzFeed to tap into Verizon Media's ad platforms. As part of the agreement, HuffPost will also contribute to Verizon Media's portfolio as an official partner, joining other partners, including The New York Times, USA Today, Associated Press, and Reuters.

A person familiar with the deal told the [Wall Street Journal](#) that Verizon Media will invest an unidentified amount of cash into Buzzfeed.

Jonah Peretti, BuzzFeed's founder and chief executive, will lead the combined company.

"We're excited about our partnership with Verizon Media, and mutual benefits that will come from syndicating content across each other's properties, collaborating on innovative ad products and the future of commerce, and tapping into the strength and creativity of Verizon Media Immersive," Peretti said in the press release.

Despite the new agreement, however, HuffPost's daily operations will not be impacted and the site will remain a "separate news organization" from BuzzFeed, BuzzFeed's editor-in-chief, Mark Schoofs, [told employees](#). Meanwhile, a new editor-in-chief will be hired for HuffPost.

The Verizon media chief executive, Guru Gowrappan, revealed to the WSJ that the idea for a partnership between Verizon and BuzzFeed first arose during a meeting with Peretti at the

Consumer Electronics Show (CES) convention in Las Vegas earlier this year. The two discussed how the companies could potentially work together.

"Verizon Media's strategy has evolved over the past two years to focus on our core strengths - ads, commerce, content and subscriptions," Gowrappan said in the press release. "We've created a powerhouse ecosystem, built on a trusted network, that delivers an end-to-end experience for consumers and advertisers. The partnership with BuzzFeed complements our roadmap while also accelerating our transformation and growth."

The agreement follows BuzzFeed's laying off of nearly 70% of its furloughed staff in July, reportedly in the wake of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ousted Election Security Chief Calls Giuliani Presser 'Most Dangerous' Television in US History

Christopher Krebs, the recently fired head of the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISC), was fired by US President Donald Trump on Tuesday night after pushing back on the president's allegations that Democrats rigged the election.

In a Thursday tweet, Christopher Krebs - until Thursday the head of the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISC) - described the Thursday press conference held by Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani and other Republicans as some of the "most dangerous" television in US history.

"That press conference was the most dangerous 1 hr 45 minutes of television in American history. And possibly the craziest. If you don't know what I'm talking about, you're lucky," he tweeted.

Krebs' tweet references a press conference held by members of Trump's legal team at the Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington DC on Thursday. During the press conference, GOP members [continued to claim that voter fraud](#), corrupted voting machines and election interference impacted the election's projected results.

"I know crimes, I can smell them. You don't have to smell this one, I can prove it to you, 18 different ways. I can prove to you that he won, Pennsylvania, by 300,000 votes. I can prove to you that he won Michigan, probably 50,000 votes," Giuliani declared during the conference, while promising additional lawsuits in Georgia, Arizona and potentially New Mexico, [NBC News reported](#).

Trump announced Krebs' firing in a Thursday tweet, suggesting that Krebs' assertion that the election was secure was "highly inaccurate", and claiming "massive improprieties and fraud" in the election.

The claims by Trump and his legal team continue after the CISC on November [released a statement](#) calling the election "the most secure in American history" and stating that there "is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or [was in any way compromised](#)."

“While we know there are many unfounded claims and opportunities for misinformation about the process of our elections, we can assure you we have the utmost confidence in the security and integrity of our elections, and you should too. When you have questions, turn to elections officials as trusted voices as they administer elections,” the statement added.

During October and November, there have emerged unsubstantiated claims of ballots found in drainage ditches in Pennsylvania, ballots in Phoenix marked with sharpies being disqualified, and thousands of voters in Michigan casting ballots under deceased people's names. [Those claims have been called into question.](#)

In a Friday interview with Fox News' Laura Ingraham, a person claiming to be a Nevada poll worker and requesting anonymity stated without providing evidence that he or she had witnessed voting fraud at a polling location.

“I’m not going to say which party does it but thousands of votes are gathered, and they come in, and then they’re dumped in a location, and then all of a sudden you lose elections that you think you’re going to win,” [the anonymous person claimed.](#)

Election officials from both political parties as well as international observers have confirmed that there have been [no serious irregularities in the 2020 US presidential election.](#)

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

‘Contested Warfighting Domain’: New UK Space Command Long Prepared to Follow US Space Force Lead

The UK’s newly announced Space Command is likely to pick up a number of projects already begun with its creation in mind and to partner closely with the US Space Force as part of a larger military confrontation with Russia and China in space.

On Wednesday, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the creation of the British Space Command [as part of the commonwealth's biggest defense expansion](#) since the end of the Cold War. The news comes less than a year after the US established its own US Space Force (USSF) as a new branch of the US military, ostensibly in response to the growing space capabilities of Russia and China.

According to Johnson, “the international situation is more perilous and more intensely competitive than at any time since the Cold War and Britain must be true to our history and stand alongside our allies. To achieve this, we need to upgrade our capabilities across the board.”

The British government began laying the groundwork for a space command over a year ago, [following a Conservative December 2019 election pledge to establish the branch.](#) [In April, Air Vice Marshall Harvey Smyth was appointed](#) the ministry’s first space commander, tasked with further coordinating what would become the commonwealth's Space Command, with a £7 billion portfolio for the next decade.

In July, [UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace, writing in the Telegraph,](#) warned of “the threat Russia poses to our national security” following a purportedly “provocative test of a weapon-like projectile from a satellite threatening the peaceful use of space.”

Two months later, British Air Force Chief Marshal Mike Wigston warned that orbital space surrounding the Earth had become a "contested war-fighting domain" to which London must defend its access.

"Today we can no longer assume the unchallenged access to air or space that we have enjoyed for the last three decades, nor can we ignore the threat of air, ballistic and cruise missile attack," [Wigston said, as reported by Sputnik](#). The language [closely mirrors that used by the Trump administration to justify](#) creation of the US Space Force, a move [decried by Russia and China as a serious threat to world peace](#) and the creation of a military entity that does exactly what it claims to mitigate: the militarization of space.

"We can no longer assume that our space superiority is a given. If deterrence fails, we must be ready to fight for space superiority," stated the USSF chief of space operations, Gen. John Raymond, [in remarks to federal lawmakers in February 2020](#).

In its [Defense Space Strategy Summary, published in June 2020](#), the Pentagon outlined that one of its goals in pursuing the Space Force was to "promote burden-sharing with our allies and partners, developing and leveraging cooperative opportunities in policy, strategy, capabilities, and operational realms."

In July, [Raymond hailed London's cooperation on the Artemis](#) small satellite program, among other space-based ventures.

"Our Space Force and Air Force teams are currently evaluating where we can best leverage this capability across the space enterprise. Satellite communications is another area where we are working closely together. Our mutual needs for increased communications bandwidth and a more resilient SATCOM [satellite communications] architecture has the United States investigating partnership arrangements and hosted payloads on Advanced Extremely High Frequency [AEHF] evolved strategic satellite communications systems, Skynet and Wideband Global SATCOM [WGS] systems, to name a few," Raymond said, adding, "Additionally, our nations recently reached agreement on technology safeguards that allows United States companies to support launching spacecraft from the UK."

Also in July, [Raytheon's UK subsidiary signed a deal with the Defense Ministry's](#) Defense Equipment and Support office to develop navigation satellites with increased resistance to jamming. The USSF also [singled out jamming as a significant potential threat](#).

Projects Potentially Within the Scope of the Space Command

[According to Defense News](#), the UK's Space Command is likely to take over development of the [new Skynet 6 communications satellites](#) and the [possible creation of a UK Global Navigation Satellite System](#), along with surveillance satellites and ballistic missile defense radar networks.

However, the UK has also recently poured money into various international space projects, [including half of the \\$1 billion July purchase of OneWeb](#), a startup that seeks to launch a broadband internet satellite megaconstellation of up to 650 satellites, which the UK would split with Indian mobile network operator Bharti Global. In November 2019, London increased its [annual financial commitment to the European Space Agency](#) by 15%, to £474 million.

The UK prime minister on Wednesday said that the opening of the commonwealth's Space Command would be accompanied by a new satellite launch site in Scotland, which would "launch its first rocket in 2022." It's unclear if Johnson intends to push the building of another launch pad or expand one of several existing commercial projects.

The Space Hub Sutherland project, a proposal approved in August to build a small rocket pad in Scotland's far north, could become a key launch base for the space program. The site was envisioned as a commercial launch pad for putting microsatellites into orbit, [but risked being cancelled last month](#) when US defense contractor Lockheed Martin, a major backer of the space hub, suddenly pulled its support.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise has said it hopes the Sutherland spaceport will be able to launch a rocket by the end of 2022, and noted that the spot's high latitude is ideal for placing satellites into polar orbits.

The Pentagon has been moving toward using smaller, cheaper satellites, leaning heavily on private space firms like SpaceX to adapt their small commercial satellites for military uses. Last month, [the US Space Force handed SpaceX a lucrative contract](#) to turn some of its Starlink low-orbit broadband internet satellites into ballistic missile early-warning devices.

Another launch site also in the works, the Shetland Space Center, on Scotland's most northerly island, is where Lockheed will move its own program that was earlier planned for Sutherland. The site plans to be able to launch a rocket by 2021.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Navy Secretary Wants New Fleet at Indo-Pacific 'Crossroads' in Case of 'Dust-Up' With China
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A new proposal to recreate a defunct US Navy fleet in the western Pacific could provide the US with another way to confront China in the South China Sea, but could also alienate regional partners at the same time.

US Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite has proposed refounding the US First Fleet and basing it in the Indo-Pacific region, possibly Singapore, at the southern tip of the South China Sea.

"We want to stand up a new numbered fleet," Braithwaite said Tuesday, at the Naval Submarine League's annual symposium, [according to USNI News](#). "And we want to put that numbered fleet in the crossroads between the Indian and the Pacific oceans, and we're really going to have an Indo-PACOM [Indo-Pacific Command] footprint."

"We can't just rely on the 7th Fleet in Japan. We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India, and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, god forbid, we were to ever get in any kind of a dust-up," he suggested.

"More importantly, it can provide a much more formidable deterrence. So we're going to create the First Fleet, and we're going to put it, if not Singapore right out of the chocks, we're going to look to make it more expeditionary-oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as to assist us," the Navy chief said. He added he had not yet spoken with Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller about the idea, but had "crossed all the other T's and dotted all the other I's." Miller took office earlier this week [after US President Donald Trump suddenly fired Mark Esper from the position](#).

Navy spokesman Capt. J.D. Dorsey told USNI News on Wednesday that "no decisions have been made regarding the establishment or location of an additional numbered fleet in the Indo Pacific."

Beginning in 1947, the US First Fleet patrolled the western Pacific as part of the US Pacific Fleet, until it was disbanded in 1973.

The US Navy is expected to grow considerably over the next decade, aiming to reach at least 355 ships from its present 293 by the year 2030. [However, some in the Pentagon are pressing for a still-larger fleet](#) of unmanned warships.

US Moving to Confront China

Washington has cast a wary eye at Chinese expansion southward into the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, where it has held military drills and built ports in Pakistan and Djibouti. In the South China Sea, where Beijing not only drills its navy but has extensive and disputed land and sea claims, the US has positioned itself as a defender of the international rules of "freedom of navigation," carrying out provocative maneuvers in which US warships purposefully violate the claims made by the [Chinese that Washington refuses to recognize](#).

"Ignoring the rules of international law, the US side has repeatedly provoked troubles in the South China Sea, exercising navigational hegemony under the pretext of 'freedom of navigation,'" Senior Colonel Li Huamin, a spokesperson for the Southern Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army, [told reporters after one such exercise in August](#). "We urge the US to stop such provocative behavior and restrict its maritime actions to avoid possible military accidents."

The US has [attempted to rally other nations in the region](#) that have overlapping sea claims to China's, and while it's had some success with Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines and Malaysia, [Indonesia recently refused to allow a bevy of US spy planes](#) that crisscross the South China Sea on daily patrols to land and refuel at their airfields.

Australia Playing Greater Role

A new US fleet based in Singapore or in Western Australia would also be able to provide support for Australia's navy, which in the past few years has moved to become a regional counterweight to China. Beginning with a 2016 white paper, [Canberra set out to dramatically expand its naval forces](#) to counter the anticipated rise of China as a major naval power in the Pacific. In 2017, they outlined a huge shipbuilding plan that would include two landing helicopter docks - smaller aircraft carriers - plus a dozen new submarines and nine new frigates, among other maritime military assets.

More recently, the White House pressed Canberra to [increase the frequency of its own freedom of navigation operations](#) (FONOPS) in the South China Sea. Canberra has denounced China's South China Sea claims and [joined fellow members of the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#) (QUAD), India and Japan, in shoring up the group's military dimension. [November's Malabar 2020 military drills were the first QUAD exercises](#) Australia had participated in since 2008, having abstained over fears of souring its relationship with Beijing.

Filipino and Australian naval forces held joint disaster response drills in Subic Bay facing onto the South China Sea, pointing to their deepening security ties in a region prone to calamities, piracy and territorial rifts. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez, File)

Some experts have warned, however, that the move could alienate US allies instead of inspiring confidence.

Indo-security expert [Blake Herzinger mused in a Tuesday Twitter thread](#) that, among other poorly-thought-out aspects of the proposal, he could “guarantee this didn’t get briefed to Singapore,” noting the move had “blindsided our most valuable partner in Southeast Asia.” “In the last two months of an administration defined by haphazard, uncoordinated policy, they drop a bomb like this that will inevitably cause partners to pull back publicly,” he added. “This administration doesn’t have the juice to make it happen anyway.”

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Black Friday Delayed: Amazon France Joins Other Retailers Pushing Shopping Day Back One Week

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Amid continued social lockdowns intended to slow the spread of COVID-19, Paris has pressured retailers to delay the onset of the holiday shopping season, which typically begins next week, on a day retailers in America like to call “Black Friday.”

Amazon France announced on Thursday it would heed this call and delay the typically massive shopping sales by one week, to December 4, joining several other large retailers.

“Today we have decided to delay the date of Black Friday if this can help shopkeepers reopen before Dec. 1. This year the Black Friday will take place on Dec. 4,” Amazon France Chief Executive [Frederic Duval told TF1 television, according to Reuters](#).

Leclerc and Carrefour, the latter of which is Europe’s biggest retailer, have also agreed to the delay. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire will meet with other retailers on Friday to urge them to delay the branded shopping spree as well.

The French Mayors’ Association on Wednesday also called for a gradual reopening of shops “to avoid a rush of clients ahead of Christmas, when allowing them to resume operations [will be inevitable](#),” [France24 noted](#).

In the United States, Black Friday follows by one day the Thanksgiving autumn feast and is considered by business as the beginning the holiday shopping season. No clear reason for the name exists, but one idea holds that the name refers to the significant increase in retail shopping, making a difference between annual profit (black lines in financial books) and loss (red lines in financial books) for retailers.

Sadly, the struggle for consumers to get lower prices that retailers offer on that day [has led to injuries, as people scramble and fight](#) to grab items off of store shelves. The ongoing pandemic, however, presents a far greater hazard, as it has already killed more than 47,000 French people this year, [according to government statistics](#).

On October 30, France entered a second COVID-19 lockdown as cases skyrocketed. However, [restrictions are not as stringent](#) as the first lockdown in the spring, and many shops have remained open. Gabriel Attal, a spokesperson for French President Emmanuel Macron, [told reporters Thursday that the country was “not at all](#) near ending the lockdown, we’re still far from it even.”

Despite the world's largest outbreak in the United States, and announcements of new restrictions in some locations, no similar call to delay the holiday shopping season has been sounded. However, [the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have advised](#) Americans not to travel for the Thanksgiving holiday, a time traditionally spent with family. In an unusual move, the White House [denounced the healthcare recommendations intended to slow the spread of the disease that has killed over 251,000 in the US, as "Orwellian."](#)

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

All in the Family: Lara Trump Reportedly Eyeing 2022 Senatorial Bid
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Lara Trump, US President Donald Trump's daughter-in-law, worked behind the scenes as a producer for "Inside Edition" before joining her father-in-law's 2016 and 2020 campaigns. Lara Trump, wife of the US president's middle son, Eric Trump, has recently been telling associates that she is considering a run for a US Senate seat in her home state of North Carolina, the New York Times [reported on Thursday, citing "three allies."](#) The 38-year-old could likely be seeking to fill an expected vacancy that will left by Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) in 2022.

"She's very charismatic, she understands retail politics well, and has a natural instinct for politics," Trump campaign adviser Mercedes Schlapp told Nytimes.com.

"In North Carolina, in particular, she's a household name and people know her. She worked really hard on the campaign and was very involved in a lot of decisions throughout."

Lara Trump was a personal trainer and TV producer for nationally-syndicated news magazine 'Inside Edition' before hopping on the 2016 presidential campaign trail via a 'Trump-Pence Women's Empowerment Tour'.

Following Trump's 2016 election win, Lara Trump continued online fundraising efforts for the campaign and became the on-air spokesperson for the "Real News Update" for Trump Productions.

The 38-year-old drew criticism earlier this year after [a Huffington Post report](#) from "top Republicans" alleged that she was receiving some \$180,000 a year via former Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale's, 'Parscale Strategy'.

She was listed as a senior consultant to Parscale during the 2020 election.

"I can pay them however I want to pay them," Parscale told the outlet when questioned about alleged payments.

Many, like the Campaign Legal Center, view the reported payments to Lara Trump and others as a way for Trump's campaign to avoid disclosing campaign-related payments, as required by the Federal Election Commission.

"According to reports filed with the Commission, the Trump campaign has not disclosed making any direct salary payments to [...] Lara Trump, or Parscale himself this election cycle," the advocacy group detailed in an [81-page filing](#) with the FEC.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

'I Don't Believe It': Kansas Restaurant Flouts Face Mask Mandate as Authorities Mull Enforcement
by [Evan Craighead](#)

As states, counties and cities in the US continue to introduce new policies and face mask mandates to slow the spread of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, many Americans are refusing to adhere to the swiftly-imposed regulations that, they suggest, infringes upon their interpretation of how the US Constitution guarantees the freedom of its citizens.

"It's supposed to be a free country, and we can make our own decisions with what we do in our lives and in our businesses," according to Barry Cowden, an anti-masker and owner of Don Chilito's Mexican Restaurant in Mission, Kansas, [to KSHB](#).

Johnson County, where the town of Mission lies, [reissued a face mask mandate on October 7](#) that went into effect on October 12 and "will stay in effect until further notice." The countywide order calls for locals to wear face coverings "in any indoor public location" and is based on data showing a 116% increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases for September alone.

Restaurants and bars - including Cowden's eatery - are defined as public locations.

District Attorney Steve Howe revealed to KSHB that his office has conducted 18 site visits to businesses that have exhibited compliance issues with current or past county-wide face-covering orders. Of the 18 businesses, according to Howe, Cowden's restaurant is the only holdout.

According to the restaurant owner, [current scientific evidence on COVID-19 transmission and facemasks](#) is not enough to force him to require employees and customers wear face coverings.

"I don't believe it," he declared, adding, "I don't think that there is any science that proves that." He does, however, believe the science behind social distancing and sanitizing surfaces, as the restaurant owner has reportedly spaced out dining tables and upped the cleaning schedule for frequently-touched surfaces.

It's worth noting that the local mask mandate in the county requires customers only wear face masks when not "actively engaged in consuming food or drink."

"He presented me with a five-page order from Governor Kelly, and I gave him my response, which is exactly what I'm giving you [...] I feel it's an encroachment and a violation of my civil liberties and rights," Cowden stated, recounting a June interaction with Howe's office.

The DA has for months reportedly been unsure of how to approach the issue - primarily due to the lack of legal precedent.

"When the legislature passed that law, basically saying prosecutors had to, if they found a violation, examine whether or not to file civil action, I've been having my lawyers look at what type of civil action can we actually bring under what provisions," Howe told KSHB, noting new information may be available following Thursday's Board of County Commissioners meeting. Fines or closure could be possibilities, according to the DA. Cowden remarked that the latter may not be necessary.

"I care about my employees, so if that's what we have to do I suppose we'll do that. If I do wear a mask I will of course wear it in protest, and I'll only do it where need be to protect my livelihood and that of my employees," the small business owner commented.

The Johnson County mask mandate comes alongside a sharp [spike in COVID-19-related fatalities](#), totaling over 251,000 American deaths, as of Wednesday. States such as Ohio, Washington, California and New Mexico have imposed various stay-at-home orders, curfews and other mitigation measures as a result of the pandemic's uptick.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Presidential Wins - Cartoon

The state of Michigan is one of several battleground states that US President Donald Trump won during the 2016 presidential cycle, but has now seen called for Democratic challenger Joe Biden in the 2020 election. The Great Lakes State is also one of many in which the Trump campaign has filed lawsuits alleging fraud.

Trump's reelection campaign on Thursday [dropped a lawsuit in Michigan](#) after officials claimed that the campaign gained the outcome initially sought - Wayne county officials not "prematurely" certifying results.

However, within moments of the announcement, Trump [took to Twitter to allege](#) that voter fraud in Detroit, part of Wayne County and [where chaos erupted at the TCF Center](#) as ballots were counted, was "rampant" and had been for a number of years. Despite the jab at the city, Trump [later doubled down](#), tweeting that the lawsuit was withdrawn because the campaign had "won" its argument.

The Trump lawsuit in Michigan alleged voting irregularities that failed to provide Republicans access to ballot counting centers, in addition to vote-counting software that was alleged to have incorrectly registered and counted ballots.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

China Warns Intel Alliance 'Their Eyes Will Be Plucked Out' if Not Careful With Hong Kong Affairs

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The Five Eyes alliance, established after World War II, involves the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. It's main objective is the sharing of intelligence information between parties. Striking back at remarks made recently by the Five Eyes intel alliance over events taking place in Hong Kong, Zhao Lijian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, [told reporters on Thursday](#) that the five nations "should be careful or their eyes will be plucked out."

"The Chinese never make trouble and are never afraid of anything," Zhao, speaking from Beijing, adding, "[It does not] matter if they had five or 10 eyes."

Zhao's remarks came in response to the alliance's Wednesday rebuke on the dismissal of four "pro-democracy" lawmakers from the Hong Kong legislature that saw over a dozen "pro-democracy" officials resign in protest from the body.

The four individuals were expelled as a result of a new law issued by Beijing stating that Hong Kong must now be "governed by patriots." [The Guardian reported](#) that the measure also barred any individual from serving in the legislature if they refused to recognize China's sovereignty over Hong Kong, sought assistance from foreign countries to intervene in the region's affairs or undertook any action that would, according to Beijing, appear to harm the semi-autonomous region's national security.

The dismissal of the lawmakers has seen Beijing criticized for its latest efforts to silence individuals of the opposition. China, however, has consistently denied the assertions, with the autonomous region's chief executive, Carrie Lam, explaining that the four officials [had already been disqualified](#) from running in elections in the coming year for not meeting unnamed requirements.

Earlier this year, Liu Yuyin, a spokesperson for China's Mission to the UN, [told counterparts at the UN Human Rights Council](#) that the highly-criticized national security laws were not imposed to silence dissent, but rather to clamp down on terrorism, as protests in the city escalated to levels considered by Beijing to present a threat national to security.

"The National Security Law for Hong Kong brings to justice only a very small number of criminal offenders who severely endanger national security. It protects the rights and freedoms of the vast majority of Hong Kong citizens who abide by law," Liu asserted, suggesting that criticism has increased due to "external forces" that can no longer use Hong Kong to undermine China in ways "as unscrupulous as they did before."

In its [joint statement](#) on the matter, the Five Eyes alliance stated that the actions by Beijing were a "clear breach" of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, a treaty signed by both China and the UK that established the "one country, two system" principle, expected to expire in 2047.

"It breaches both China's commitment that Hong Kong will enjoy a 'high degree of autonomy,' and the right to freedom of speech," the statement reads. "The disqualification rules appear part of a concerted campaign to silence all critical voices following the postponement of September's Legislative Council elections, the imposition of charges against a number of elected legislators, and actions to undermine the freedom of Hong Kong's vibrant media."

"We call on China to stop undermining the rights of the people of Hong Kong to elect their representatives in keeping with the Joint Declaration and Basic Law. For the sake of Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, it is essential that China and the Hong Kong authorities respect the channels for the people of Hong Kong to express their legitimate concerns and opinions," the statement added, before concluding with a call for authorities to "immediately reinstate" the four lawmakers.

The government of Chinese President Xi Jinping has repeatedly come under sharp criticism from heads of state over Beijing's handling of Hong Kong autonomy and the implementation of new and stricter laws. Most recently, [UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab](#) stated that Beijing's stance toward opposition lawmakers was "part of a pattern apparently designed to harass and stifle all voices critical of China's policies."

The administration of US President Donald Trump [has issued sanctions](#) on a [number of individuals](#), including the island territory's Lam, for undermining Hong Kong autonomy. Trump [is expected to impose additional measures](#) in coming months.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump's Refusal to Concede US Election 'Puts Our Country at Peril,' Says Former Obama Adviser
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Valerie Jarrett served as a senior adviser to former US President Barack Obama and also co-chaired the incoming administration's transition team in 2008, as officials prepared for a smooth changing of the guard in the White House.

Jarrett, who is now a senior adviser at the Obama Foundation, [told CNBC's Karen Tso](#) on Wednesday that US President Donald Trump's refusal to concede the US election to Democratic challenger Joe Biden poses a serious setback for the US.

"Every day that goes by that there is this lack of cooperation, this unwillingness to face the reality of the outcome of the election, puts our country at peril," she said, underscoring that a hold-up of the White House transition would create a series of delays which could be devastating amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trump has not conceded the election and has largely focused his attention on unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud that range from ballots allegedly submitted by deceased voters to legal challenges in battleground states claiming that Republican poll overseers were excluded from counting absentee ballots. The Trump campaign on Thursday was granted a partial recount in Wisconsin's Dane and Milwaukee counties, after forking over a \$3 million payment for the process.

Since the election was called by US media in Biden's favor, having reached the required 270 Electoral College votes to grasp the US presidency, the transition team has been mostly kept on pause due to the General Services Administration's (GSA) refusal to recognize Biden's status as US President-elect.

The GSA's role in the transition is to turn over millions of dollars in funding to the incoming team and provide access to government officials in an effort to create a smooth transition from one administration to the next. Overall, the acknowledgement by the agency signals a formal winner of the presidential race, outside of the US media's call.

Biden, [in Thursday remarks](#), stated that he had not ruled out legal action over the stalled transition, [explaining](#) that "we'll get further along by actually working with Republican colleagues now."

With the results of the election being contested in the middle of a pandemic, Jarrett warned that any transition delay will ultimately have irreversible consequences.

The most recent information from the Trump administration suggests that Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine could be ready for mass distribution by April, although it would [not be delivered to New York state](#) until cleared by that state's governor.

"There's a difference between having a vaccine and vaccinating people," Jarrett said. "And the decisions that are being made by the Trump administration today will be implemented by the Biden administration, they should be privy to those conversations."

Recalling her time on Obama's transition team in 2008, Jarrett noted that the administration was able to "hit the ground running" during a global financial crisis due to the "cooperation and support" from the departing Bush administration.

When the Obama administration came into force, the US was deep into its worst economic disaster since the Great Depression, with home values plummeting, retirement accounts depleted and unemployment reaching all-time highs.

Biden [has so far vowed](#) that once he is in the Oval Office he will implement a federal mask mandate, work with state officials to enact similar restrictions at a local level, and expand testing and contact tracing through the use of science, among other steps.

The [latest data from the Johns Hopkins University](#) indicates that over 11.6 million Americans have contracted COVID-19, with over 251,000 killed. Although the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [strongly recommend ahead of Thanksgiving](#) that travelers stay home and avoid crowds, officials anticipate that numbers will likely skyrocket during the colder holiday season.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Historic Drop in US Greenhouse Gases Amid Pandemic Hindered by Extreme Wildfires - Study by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

In 2020, western portions of the US underwent a series of devastating wildfires that burned millions of acres, destroyed thousands of buildings and killed dozens of residents. In California alone, over 4.1 million acres were torched as extremely dry vegetation served as an igniter. A [study published Thursday](#) by research organization BloombergNEF has determined that while the COVID-19 pandemic was forecast to drop US greenhouse gases by 9.2% in 2020, those predictions may not come to fruition due to dry season forest fires along the US West Coast. Taking into account air pollution driven by the deadly fires, officials indicated that net emissions are instead expected to slide 6.4% when compared against greenhouse gas figures from 2019. "[The increase in forest fire emissions] partially offset the drop in emissions from human activity," the report states, noting that the fires unleashed some 184 million tons of carbon dioxide. "The fires in the US in 2020 are part of a global trend, since 2019, of forest fires occurring more frequently in temperate regions."

The 2020 wildfire season saw enormous blazes across California, Oregon and Washington state, as strong winds spread flames and [sent wildfire smoke to the nation's East Coast](#). At the time, the US National Weather Service confirmed that smoke had been pushed across the Mid-Atlantic with the help of a strong jet stream. Smoke from the fires even managed to [make it to Europe](#).

According to the [National Interagency Fire Center](#), an average of 6.9 million acres have been burned every year since 2000; however, in California, over 4.1 million acres were burned during

the 2020 season alone. In neighboring Oregon, over 1.2 million acres burned while Washington state saw over 700,000 acres burned.

Despite the wildfires, the report notes that while "a burnt forest will regrow, taking greenhouse gases back out of the atmosphere [...] there is no equivalent pathway for sequestration opened when fossil fuels are extracted and burned."

Additionally, researchers hailed transportation emissions dropping by 4% and power sector emissions depleting by nearly 3%, stating that the "economic disruption of 2020" put the US back on track to meet the promises of the Paris Climate Agreement, which the Trump administration [officially began to withdraw the US from in 2019](#).

However, the gains aren't likely to stick around once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and the economy begins to rebound. The report ultimately warns that changes in emissions "must be year on year" to curb greenhouse gas effects on the climate.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US to Label West Bank Settlement Exports as 'Made in Israel' - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, November 18 (Sputnik) - The United States will now require to label all goods coming from the West Bank Settlement as 'Made in Israel', US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in a statement on Thursday.

"Today, the Department of State is initiating new guidelines to ensure that country of origin markings for Israeli and Palestinian goods are consistent with our reality-based foreign policy approach," Pompeo said. "In accordance with this announcement, all producers within areas where Israel exercises the relevant authorities - most notably Area C under the Oslo Accords - will be required to mark goods as "Israel", "Product of Israel", or "Made in Israel" when exporting to the United States."

Pompeo explained that such labeling means a recognition that Area C producers operate within Israel's economic and administrative framework and their products should be treated like those as well.

"This update will also eliminate confusion by recognizing that producers in other parts of the West Bank are for all practical purposes administratively separate and that their goods should be marked accordingly," the secretary added.

Pompeo continued to say that products in the West Bank areas where the Palestinian Authority maintains relevant authorities should be labeled as goods of "West Bank", while goods made in Gaza will be marked as of "Gaza."

"Under the new approach, we will no longer accept "West Bank/Gaza" or similar markings, in recognition that Gaza and the West Bank are politically and administratively separate and should be treated accordingly," he stated.

Pompeo also underscored that Washington is committed to Trump's Vision for Peace, and will continue to oppose those nations and international institutions which delegitimize or penalize Israel and Israeli producers in the West Bank.

For decades, Israel has been in conflict with Palestinians who have been seeking diplomatic recognition for an independent state on the territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli government has refused to recognize Palestine as an independent political and diplomatic entity and continues to build settlements in the occupied areas despite objections from the United Nations.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Weekly Jobless Claims At 742,000 for Week to November 14 - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Some 742,000 Americans filed for jobless benefits last week, about 4 percent higher from the previous week, Labor Department data showed on Thursday, as the US job market continued to struggle nine months into the coronavirus pandemic.

"In the week ending November 14, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 742,000," the department said in a news release. It revised upward claims in the previous week to November 7 to 711,000. That raised the latest week's claims by 31,000, or about 4 percent. Continuous claims for the latest week showed filings from 6.4 million Americans, lower than the previous week's number of 6.8 million. The unemployment rate, meanwhile, stood at 4.3 percent, down 0.3 percent from the previous week.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April, at the height of lockdowns forced by the COVID-19. A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. For all of September, there were just 661,000 jobs added.

The US economy grew by a record 33.1 percent in the third quarter, after shrinking by 31.4 percent in the previous three months and 5 percent in the first quarter. In 2019, the economy grew by 4.1 percent.

Despite the rebound, the economic outlook for the United States remains dire with a rash of new coronavirus infections reported across a nation with more than 11.5 million COVID-19 cases and over 250,000 fatalities to date. New York City, one of the US hotspots for the coronavirus during the height of the pandemic's outbreak in March, will close schools from Thursday after reaching a 3 percent test positivity rate over a seven-day rolling average.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Campaign Says Withdrawing Lawsuit in Michigan – Statement

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) – The Trump campaign is withdrawing its lawsuit on presidential election results in the US state of Michigan, Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani said in a statement on Thursday.

"This morning we are withdrawing our lawsuit in Michigan as a direct result of achieving the relief we sought: to stop the election in Wayne County from being prematurely certified before residents can be assured that every legal vote has been counted and every illegal vote has not been counted," Giuliani said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New US North Korea-Related Sanctions Target Mokran LLC in Russia – Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on a Russian construction company and a second North Korean business that operates in Russia, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today's action targets two entities, Mokran LLC, a Russian construction company, and Korea Cholsan General Trading Corporation, a North Korean company operating in Russia, for having engaged in, facilitated, or been responsible for the exportation of forced labor from North Korea, including exportation to generate revenue for the Government of North Korea or Workers' Party of Korea," the statement said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Support For Death Penalty in US Drops to 5 Decade Low - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Americans supporting the death penalty, while still a majority, fell to the lowest level in nearly 50 years in the latest Gallup poll on Thursday.

"For a fourth consecutive year, fewer than six in 10 Americans (55 percent) are in favor of the death penalty for convicted murderers. Death penalty support has not been lower since 1972, when 50 percent were in favor," a press release explaining the poll said.

Gallup has asked Americans whether they are "in favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder" since 1936, when 58 percent said they were.

The latest survey shows declines in support for capital punishment by both Democrats and independents, with 39 percent and 54 percent support respectively. Republican backing for the death penalty has held steady, with 79 percent supporting it, unchanged since 2016, the release added.

Twenty-two states do not allow the death penalty by law, with nearly half of those having enacted their current laws in the past two decades. Three additional states - California, Oregon and Pennsylvania - have laws permitting the death penalty, but their governors have issued moratoriums on its use.

Consistent with partisans' preferences on the issue, most of the states that allow the death penalty are Republican-leaning, and most of those that prohibit its use are Democratic-leaning, according to Gallup.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

New US North Korea-Related Sanctions Target Mokran LLC in Russia - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on a Russian construction company and a second North Korean business that operates in Russia, the US Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"Today's action targets two entities, Mokran LLC, a Russian construction company, and Korea Cholsan General Trading Corporation, a North Korean company operating in Russia, for having engaged in, facilitated, or been responsible for the exportation of forced labor from North Korea, including exportation to generate revenue for the government of North Korea or Workers' Party of Korea," the statement said.

The Treasury Department noted that the United States is committed to implementing and enforcing both unilateral and United Nations sanctions against North Korea and those countries that have not repatriated North Korean workers according to UN Security Council resolutions.

"North Korea has a long history of exploiting its citizens by sending them to distant countries to work in grueling conditions in order to financially support Pyongyang and its weapons programs," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

Mnuchin urged the states who host North Korean workers to send them home, the statement said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US House Republicans Rebuke Washington, DC Mayor for Ignoring Attacks on Trump Supporters

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Attacks by far-left activists on a Washington demonstration backing President Donald Trump last weekend provoked an angry rebuke of Washington, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser and a demand for answers in a letter on Thursday.

Thousands of Trump supporters who descended on Washington last weekend to protest election faced attacks from far-left Antifa and Black Lives Matter activists. One person was stabbed and 20 people arrested, according to police.

"You claim Washington, D.C. 'upholds the values of love, inclusivity, and diversity' but your silence following the violence perpetrated against Americans who support President Trump suggests you apply these principles only for those who share your same political opinions," ranking Republican on the House Oversight Committee James Comer and four other lawmakers wrote in a letter to Bowser.

The Republican lawmakers also wrote to the Oversight Committee's Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney asking for hearings on the weekend attacks.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Campaign Says Withdrawing Lawsuit in Michigan - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The Trump campaign is withdrawing its lawsuit on presidential election results in the US state of Michigan, Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani said in a statement on Thursday.

"This morning we are withdrawing our lawsuit in Michigan as a direct result of achieving the relief we sought: to stop the election in Wayne County from being prematurely certified before residents can be assured that every legal vote has been counted and every illegal vote has not been counted," Giuliani said.

On Wednesday, two Republican members of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers -Monica Palmer and William Hartmann - signed affidavits that they received threats in order to certify the county's election results.

Palmer and Hartman said they were called racists and for urging the authorities not to certify the election results, according to media reports.

Trump personally called Palmer to make sure she is safe after receiving the threats, the reports said. Palmer noted that she did not discuss the vote count with the US president.

Democratic party nominee Joe Biden - projected by US media networks to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election - won 68 percent of the vote in Wayne County. More than 850,000 ballots were cast in Wayne County, which includes the city of Detroit, according to the election results posted by Fox News. Biden won the state by roughly 146,000 votes, or 2.7 percent of the total.

Michigan, which carries 16 electoral votes, was one of the most critical battleground states in the 2020 election.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Top Republican in US House Blasts Dems for Failure to Pass COVID-19 Equipment Funding

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy on Thursday accused Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Democrats for delays in passing emergency funding for COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

"There is one road block in this - Speaker Pelosi," McCarthy told reporters regarding COVID-19 equipment funding.

McCarthy called on the 23 Democratic House members who signed a release petition to expedite such emergency funding on the pandemic back in September to "keep their word" and join the Republicans in outvoting the Democratic caucus led by Pelosi to allow the measure to pass the House of Representatives.

He said Pelosi's word was unreliable since she had twice dissolved the House and sent its members home in recent months without first pushing through urgently-needed pandemic funding as she had previously promised.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Colombian President Duque Says Bogota's Relations With US to Strengthen Under Biden

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Colombian President Ivan Duque on Thursday said he is certain ties between his country and the United States will grow stronger under projected President-elect Joe Biden's administration.

"We value the support that President-elect Biden has given to Colombia over the last two decades, and we want to keep on strengthening that relationship and I am certain that it will be strengthened day by day," Duque said at an event. "I am certain that with President Biden a bipartisan and bicameral support for Colombia will continue."

President Donald Trump, he added, also worked with Columbia on major challenges including the fight against drug trafficking and the migration crisis.

Every US major media outlet has projected Biden as the winner of the November 3 presidential election but Trump has refused to concede. The president has filed several legal challenges and recount requests that have failed to reverse any of the results. All votes must be certified and disputes resolved by December 8. Last week, a coalition of US federal and state election agencies said the 2020 vote was the most secure in US history.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Three in 5 Americans Want Trump to Admit Defeat, Concede to Biden - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - A 61 percent majority of Americans believe President Donald Trump should concede the election to former Vice President Joe Biden, including 37 percent of Republican voters, a new Rasmussen Report poll revealed on Thursday.

"Most voters now believe President Trump should admit that he lost the election, [including] eighty-four percent (84 percent) of Democrats, 37 percent of Republicans and 59 percent of voters not affiliated with either major party," a press release explaining the poll said.

Even among those who strongly approve of Trump's job performance, nearly one-in-four (23 percent) believe he should admit he lost, the release said.

Trump continues to insist that he won but massive voter fraud and impropriety have cost him the election. Trump has initiated recounts in several states and filed lawsuits in state and federal courts to seek redress. However, many of the lawsuits have been dismissed by the courts and several states have said they failed to find substantial evidence of election fraud.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Over 75% Americans Believe US Divided on Important Values - Poll

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - More than three quarters of Americans believe the United States is now more divided over important values than it was when President Donald Trump took office four years ago, a new poll reported on Thursday.

"Three-fourths (76 percent) of Americans believe that we are greatly divided when it comes to the nation's most important values," Monmouth University Polls said in a statement. "Just 21 percent feel we are generally in agreement on these values."

Ninety percent of Democrats said the country had become more divided under Trump and 49 percent of Republicans.

Less than one third of Americans believe projected President-Elect Joe Biden will be able to restore an improved measure of national unity, the poll reported.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

French, German C-130J Air Transport Crews to Train at New French Center - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The crews of a new joint French and German military airlift squadron operating US-built C-130J Super-Hercules transport aircraft will train at a new center to be built in France, Lockheed Martin announced in a press release on Thursday.

"French and German C-130J Super Hercules aircrews and maintainers will train in a facility located in France, built and equipped by Lockheed Martin for the countries' bi-national C-130J Super Hercules Squadron," the company said.

Lockheed Martin will provide training devices, the learning management system, courseware and options for five years of training services under the terms of a new direct commercial sale contract, allowing for in-country learning at Evreux-Fauville Air Base in the Normandy region of France, the release added.

Lockheed Martin will break ground on the training center in 2021 and aircrew and maintainers will begin training in the center in 2024 on both C-130J-30 airlifters and KC-130J tanker aircraft. The partnership will be the first of its kind since the first Hercules marks started operating 65 years ago, according to the release.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Seeks to Sell Up to 40 F-35 Fighter Jets to Switzerland - Lockheed Martin

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is offering to sell Switzerland a package of up to 40 F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters for its New Fighter Aircraft (NFA) program, Lockheed Martin announced in a press release on Thursday.

"On November 18, the US government and Lockheed Martin submitted an F-35 proposal to the Swiss government in support of Switzerland's New Fighter Aircraft (NFA) competition," the release said.

Lockheed Martin explained that the proposal is a total package offering that includes up to 40 F-35A aircraft, a sustainment solution tailored to Swiss autonomy requirements and a comprehensive training program.

"The offer uses the F-35 Global Support Solution for sustainment to ensure Switzerland benefits from the European F-35 economies of scale to realize lower sustainment costs for the Swiss Air Force. It also includes a six-month spares package to ensure the Swiss Air Force has the ability to conduct autonomous operations," the release said.

Lockheed Martin is also offering an option for the assembly of four aircraft in Switzerland to ensure the Swiss Air Force and Swiss industry gain an understanding of how to maintain the F-35 airframe and its advanced capabilities for the life of the program, the release added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Campaign to File Major Lawsuit in Georgia - Giuliani

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's campaign plans to file a major lawsuit in Georgia alleging massive election irregularities in the key battleground state, the incumbent's lawyer Rudy Giuliani told reporters on Thursday.

"We are about to file a major lawsuit in Georgia. That will be filed probably tomorrow," Giuliani said during a press conference.

Giuliani alleged that in the city of Atlanta Republicans were not allowed to inspect the absentee mail-in ballot processing. He added that the campaign has evidence of "numerous double voters", "out-of-state voters" and "specific evidence of intimidation and changes of vote.

He dismissed a manual full recount which found several deficiencies in the state, but is expected to confirm Donald Trump's defeat to the Democratic challenger Joe Biden. Georgia is expected to announce the results of a hand recount shortly. State officials do not expect the results to overturn Biden's victory in the state, which he won by nearly 14,000 votes (0.3% of the total).

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Campaign Wants Justice Dept. to Probe Dominion Voting Software - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - A top lawyer for US President Donald Trump's campaign, Sidney Powell, demanded on Thursday the Department of Justice launch a criminal investigation into allegations that voting machinery was used to rig the results of the election in favor of Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

Dominion Voting Systems, machines' manufacturer, has categorically denied any issues with its soft- and hardware. The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency also stated that there is no evidence that "any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised."

"I think a full scale criminal investigation needs to be taken immediately by the Department of Justice and by every state's equivalent - Attorney's General office or state's investigatory unit," Powell said during a press conference as part of the Trump campaign's legal team.

She repeated allegations that the development of the voting systems with hidden capabilities of flipping and trashing votes, as well as overlooking ballots deficiencies were originally ordered by Venezuela's leadership with China and Cuba having a hand in it.

"Why they were allowed in the US is beyond my comprehension," Powell said. "We have mathematical evidence in a number of states of massive quantities of Trump's votes being trashed, just simply put in the trash like you would on your computer with any file and Biden's vote being injected."

She also said that the campaign has at least one very strong witness who explained how the machinery works.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Urges Immediate Ceasefire, Return to Peace in Ethiopia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States strongly urges an immediate de-escalation of tensions and a cessation of hostiles in Ethiopia's Tigray region, US Department of State Bureau of African Affairs Assistant Secretary Tibor Nagy said in a press briefing on Thursday.

"We strongly urge an immediate de-escalation of tensions, a cessation of hostilities and a return to peace," Nagy said.

The fighting in northern Ethiopia broke out in early November after the federal government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPFL), the ruling party in the region, of attacking a local military base and launched a security operation against the party.

Nagy said the fighting has continued and the attack on the Eritrean capital city of Asmara over the weekend has suggested that the TPFL seeks to internationalize the conflict.

Washington has been in contact with both the Eritrean government, urging for a continued restraint, and with representatives of the Ethiopian diaspora, pressing them to restore communication in Tigray to enable greater contact with civilians, including US citizens of the region, Nagy noted.

The Ethiopian government and the TPFL should maintain access for humanitarian organizations to allow them to assist vulnerable groups in the region, Nagy said.

At the same time, all civilians trapped in conflict must be protected and all reports of atrocities must be investigated, Nagy added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Giuliani Alleges 'Centralized' Plan of Mass Voter Fraud Took Place in 2020 US Election

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani said during a news conference on Thursday that a centralized plan of mass voter fraud took place in the 2020 US presidential election.

"As we started investigating... what emerged very quickly is there's not a singular voter fraud in one state," Giuliani said. "This pattern repeats itself in a number of states, almost exactly the same pattern, which to any experienced investigator, prosecutor would suggest there was a plan from a centralized place to execute these various acts of voter fraud specifically focused on big cities."

Giuliani said voter fraud took place mostly in big cities controlled by Democrats, such as the city of Philadelphia, and added that US judges will not be happy with the evidence that will be presented in court.

Giuliani also said several Trump campaign lawyers have recently dropped out of court cases because they have been threatened for defending the US president.

The Trump campaign will file new lawsuits in the battleground state of Georgia and possibly in Arizona and Wisconsin as well, Giuliani added.

President Donald Trump has said he won the election but victory was stolen from him via massive fraud and acts of impropriety by Democrats. Trump has initiated audits and recounts in several states as well as filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said they have found no substantial evidence of fraud.

Major US media networks have projected Democratic nominee Joe Biden to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

COVID-19 Fatality Rate Exceeds 20% in US Assisted Living Facilities - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - One in five residents in US assisted living facilities (ALF) who contract COVID-19 die from the disease, the Centers for Disease Control said in a report on Thursday.

"As of October 15, 2020, an average of one death occurred among every five ALF residents with COVID-19, compared with one death among every 40 persons in the general population with COVID-19," the report said.

Compared with nursing homes, which provide constant medical supervision, ALFs serve elderly residents who are mostly independent but require some help with daily tasks.

Although the impact of COVID-19 in nursing homes is well documented, relatively little has been reported on the coronavirus disease among staff and residents in ALF, in part due to the limited availability of data, the report said.

Based on limited data available in 39 states, 22 percent of ALFs reported one or more cases of COVID-19 among residents and staff members. Of residents who contracted the disease, 21 percent died, compared with less than 3 percent among the general population, the report added.

As of November 6, 2020, approximately 569,000-616,000 COVID-19 cases and 91,500 deaths were reported among long-term care facilities (LTCF) - a broad category that includes both nursing homes and ALFs - accounting for 6 percent of total COVID-19 cases and 39 percent of deaths, according to the report.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Embassy in Addis Ababa, UN Work to Relocate American Citizens in Tigray - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is working with the United Nations and other partners to organize the relocation of American citizens from the embattled Tigray region, US Department of State Bureau of African Affairs Assistant Secretary Tibor Nagy said on Thursday.

"Our top priority is ensuring the welfare protection and security of US citizens," Nagy said in a press briefing. "The US Embassy in Addis Ababa continues to work closely with the United Nations and others to relocate US citizens in Tigray as conditions permit."

Nagy added that Washington is in coordination with the Ethiopian government, local authorities and international partners to ensure that civilians in the region have access to humanitarian aid.

The fighting in northern Ethiopia broke out in early November after the federal government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the ruling party in the region, of attacking a local military base and launched a security operation against it.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Immigration Police Catch 150 Aliens This Month Who Broke Pledge to Leave Country

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - A roundup of illegal aliens who promised but failed to voluntarily exit the United States resulted in 150 arrests so far in November, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency said in a press release on Thursday.

"Since Nov. 2, ICE Enforcement and Removal (ERO) officers have arrested more than 150 individuals who failed to depart after being granted voluntary departure. About 86 percent of those arrested also had criminal convictions or pending charges," the release said. Voluntary departure is typically requested by the alien and granted by an immigration judge, where the alien is granted about 60 to 120 days to arrange their own departure, the release said.

An illegal who complies with a voluntary departure order avoids barriers to readmission that accompany a formal deportation, while saving taxpayers money, according to ICE.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Russia National Osipova Asks US Court to Allow Contact With Her Children - Lawyers

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Russian national Bogdana Osipova, who has been released from US prison until she is re-sentenced next year, asked the court to allow her to contact her children, Osipova's lawyers said in a motion on Thursday.

"Ms. Mobley, based on the foregoing assertions and argument, prays that this Court amend the conditions of her release by removing the requirement of avoiding any contact with her children," the lawyers said using Osipova's married name.

Osipova has demonstrated that her children are not traditional victims in a criminal case and her contacting them will not cause any danger, the lawyers said, adding that her previous contact while she was imprisoned did not create any problems.

"The physical distance between Ms. Mobley and her children during her release pending re-sentencing remains; the only difference is that now Ms. Mobley is in the Eastern District of New York rather than the Districts of Kansas or Connecticut, while her children are still in Russia," the lawyers said.

In 2014, Osipova left the United States with her child without his consent from former husband Brian Mobley while pregnant with another child. She was arrested upon returning to the United States in 2017 and sentenced to seven years in prison for child abduction and extortion in 2019. In August, the Kansas Court of Appeals cleared Osipova of the extortion charges and ordered a revision of the verdict. Abduction of a child by one of the parents is punishable by a sentence of three years in prison – the amount of time Osipova already served. Osipova was released on a \$25,000 bail and will appear before the court to hear the revised verdict on January 8.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Campaign Lawyer Giuliani Says 100,000 Ballots Should Be Invalidated in Wisconsin

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani in a press conference on Thursday said the president's re-election campaign expects the battleground state of Wisconsin to invalidate 100,000 votes due to violations of state law.

The Trump campaign on Wednesday said it paid \$3 million for a vote recount in two Wisconsin counties - Milwaukee and Dane - that Biden won heavily.

"We have to first create a contest in Wisconsin before we can move to bringing a fulsome federal lawsuit," Giuliani said. "The contest from everything I can see is going to overturn the vote because it's going to show somewhere around 100,000 illegal ballots in two counties that Biden carried by 75 - 80 percent."

Giuliani said 100,000 absentee mail-in ballots should be invalidated because they were sent out with no applications. Moreover, he said several precincts in Michigan and Wisconsin have over votes from 150 percent to up to 300 percent.

Biden won Wisconsin by more than 20,600 votes (0.6% of the total) overall. The former vice president won the two counties being recounted by more than 360,000 votes combined.

Giuliani said that the campaign will file a lawsuit in Wisconsin if necessary, adding that a major lawsuit will be filed in Michigan and possibly in Arizona as well. Giuliani said they have enough evidence to overturn the result of the US election.

President Donald Trump has said he won the election but victory was stolen from him via massive fraud and acts of impropriety by Democrats. Trump has initiated audits and recounts in several states as well as filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said they have found no substantial evidence of fraud.

Major US media networks have projected Democratic nominee Joe Biden to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senator Murphy Says Trump Admiration Has No Plans to Brief Biden Team on Vaccines

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US Senator Chris Murphy on Thursday said President Donald Trump's administration has no plans to brief the team of projected President-elect Joe Biden on COVID-19 vaccines.

"Just off a conference call with Trump Administration vaccine distribution team. They confirmed that they have not briefed anyone on President-elect Biden's team and have no plans to do so," Murphy stated."

Murphy called such decision "potentially catastrophic."

"First, there needs to be an integration between Trump's team and Biden's team to assure a clean hand-off of a complicated distribution plan," the Senator stressed. "Second, Biden will likely want to improve the plan, but he can't do that effectively if he isn't read into ahead of time."

Biden in a press conference on Monday urged President Donald Trump to start coordinating plans for nationwide coronavirus vaccination and warned that more people may die unless Trump stops obstructing the transition of power process.

Trump has said that as part of his Operation Warp Speed, he has made all necessary preparations for the US military to start distributing millions of vaccine doses across the United States as soon as the vaccine is ready.

Every US media outlet has projected Biden the winner of the November 13 election but Trump has continued to file legal challenges claiming voting irregularities, all of which have been unsuccessful to date.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Smithsonian Museums, Zoo in Washington to Close Due to COVID-19 - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - All Smithsonian museums, including National Gallery and National Zoo, will close beginning November 23 due to the new spike of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Smithsonian Institution said in a statement on Thursday.

"Due to rising regional and national cases related to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, all Smithsonian museums, including the National Zoo, will temporarily close to the public starting Monday, Nov. 23," the statement read.

Visitors may enter most of the museums and the zoo until Sunday using free timed entry passes, while outdoor gardens will remain open, it added.

The greater Washington area reported over 5,000 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday, hitting new single-day record.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

BuzzFeed Buys HuffPost in Partnership Deal with Verizon Media - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - BuzzFeed Inc. acquired HuffPost in a strategic partnership deal with Verizon Media, US digital media giants announced on Thursday.

"Verizon Media and BuzzFeed today announced a new strategic partnership across content and advertising, the acquisition of HuffPost by BuzzFeed, and an investment that will make Verizon Media a minority shareholder in BuzzFeed," according to companies' statement.

As part of the agreement, Verizon Media and BuzzFeed agree to syndicate content across each other's platforms, as well as jointly explore monetization and advertising opportunities.

"From powering new consumer shopping experiences, to content syndication, to innovative ad products, the partnership will unlock new revenue opportunities for both media companies. The addition of HuffPost - which BuzzFeed will acquire - brings BuzzFeed a universally known brand with significant scale, and an audience complementary to its own," the companies said.

HuffPost will continue to cooperate with Verizon Media as its official publishing partner with its content "amplified via Yahoo channels and products, boosting traffic and monetization."

The companies didn't disclose financial details of the deal.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Judge Temporarily Halts Federal Execution of Only Woman on Death Row - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - A US judge has temporarily halted the federal execution of the only woman currently on death row, a court document revealed on Thursday.

"The Court will enter an order briefly staying Plaintiff's execution date to permit Harwell and Henry to finalize her clemency petition but will not enjoin any government official, including the President, from taking 'adverse action on her request for reprieve and commutation,'" Judge Randolph Moss wrote in the court opinion.

The inmate Lisa Montgomery was sentenced to death in 2008 after she was convicted for a kidnapping that resulted in a death.

She was scheduled to be executed on December 8.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Contractor Gets 41-Months in Jail For Theft From US Base in Afghanistan - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The US sentenced an American military contractor to more than three years in prison for stealing more than \$300,000 worth of equipment from a military base in Afghanistan, the Justice Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Larry J. Green, 43, of Chesapeake, Virginia was sentenced before US District Judge Arenda L. Wright Allen to 41 months imprisonment to be followed by two months of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$179,708," the release said.

Green admitted that, between April 2015 and July 2015, he and others stole property, including several generators and a truck.

With help of co-conspirators he sold the items to unknown persons in the Afghan city of Kandahar, the release added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US, Canada, Mexico to Extend Non-Essential Travel Restrictions Through Dec. 21 - DHS

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States has reached an agreement with Mexico and Canada to extend border restrictions that limit non-essential travel until December 21 due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, Department of Homeland Security Acting Secretary Chad Wolf said in a statement on Thursday.

"In order to continue to prevent the spread of COVID, the US, Mexico and Canada will extend the restrictions on non-essential travel through Dec. 21," Wolf said via Twitter.

Before the announcement, the restrictions at US land border crossings with Canada and Mexico were set to expire on Saturday. All non-essential travel between the United States and Canada has been halted since March 20.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CEASEFIRE

* French President Emmanuel Macron held talks on Thursday via video link with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and declared his desire to take measures to protect the religious and cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Elysee Palace said in a statement.

* More than 1,200 refugees returned to Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia on Thursday, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian discussed the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh by phone, stressing the importance of fulfilling the provisions of the trilateral statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Lavrov and Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aytvazyan discussed over the telephone the implementation of the agreements between Moscow, Yerevan and Baku on Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

US POLICY ON NORTH KOREA

* The United States has imposed new North Korea-related sanctions on a Russian construction company and a second North Korean business that operates in Russia, the Treasury Department said in a statement on Thursday.

* The United States is ready to resume talks with Pyongyang on the goals that were described at the 2018 Singapore Summit, including the denuclearization of North Korea, the US mission to the UN in Vienna said.

US POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

* The Trump campaign is withdrawing its lawsuit on presidential election results in the US state of Michigan, Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani said in a statement on Thursday.

* Giuliani said in a press conference that President Trump's re-election campaign expects the battleground state of Wisconsin to invalidate 100,000 votes due to violations of state law.

* Giuliani said during a news conference that a centralized plan of mass voter fraud took place in the 2020 US presidential election.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* Russia is bewildered by the United States' statements about the international conference on Syrian refugee repatriation that Damascus hosted last week, the Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.

* The United States' recent missile tests contradict its statements that US air defense systems do not target Russia, Zakharova said.

* The United States acts as a self-appointed 'arbiter' in international sport with its new anti-doping bill, named after WADA informant Grigory Rodchenkov, Zakharova said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Some 2.3Mln Children in Need of Humanitarian Assistance in Tigray Region - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - More than two million children require humanitarian aid in Ethiopia's Tigray region amid ongoing armed conflict there, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said in a statement.

"Inside the Tigray region, restricted access and the ongoing communication blackout have left an estimated 2.3 million children in need of humanitarian assistance and out of reach," Fore said on Thursday.

Fore noted that since the beginning of the conflict earlier in November, almost 30,000 people fled to Sudan, some 12,000 of them children.

"We are working with our partners to urgently provide much needed life-saving support, including health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene services," Fore said. "With more than 200,000 people expected to cross in the coming days and weeks, additional support is crucial for us to meet the rising needs."

Fore urged all sides to the conflict to allow humanitarian organizations unimpeded access to all affected communities.

"All parties to the conflict should refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and should protect essential civilian infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities and water and sanitation installations," Fore said.

The fighting in the north of Ethiopia broke out in early November after the federal government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front - the ruling party in the region - of attacking a local military base and launched a operation against it. The ensuing clashes prompted fears of a new civil war in Ethiopia and the conflict's spillover into neighboring countries.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Michigan Secretary of State Undercuts Republican Argument to Rescind Vote Certification

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Michigan Secretary of Sate Jocelyn Benson contrary to Republican claims said a post-election audit will be conducted after final certification of the winner according to ballots cast and counted.

Benson's statement comes after two Republicans tried to rescind their certification of voting results from the state's largest county because they feared a post-election audit would not be conducted. Projected President-elect Joe Biden won Michigan by more than 155,000 votes (2.8% of the total).

"We are on track to perform a statewide risk-limiting audit of November's general election, which we've been building towards and planning for over the last 22 months, as well as local procedural audits of individual jurisdictions," Benson said via Twitter on Thursday.

The two Wayne County Republicans first agreed to certify the vote after the two Democrats on the panel confirmed a post-election audit would be conducted. Benson on Wednesday announced that all counties had certified the vote and the state would do the final certification

on Monday. Then, however, the same Republicans signed affidavits rescinding their decisions, which they claimed were made under duress after death threats.

But the state secretary also made clear that without irrefutable evidence of irregularities - which President Donald Trump has fallen short of in his allegation that the Michigan vote was rigged to help Biden - the certification of ballots cast and counted will stand.

She also said certification had to come before the audit to make available the required documentation for the audit.

"Notably audits are neither designed to address nor performed in response to false or mythical allegations of 'irregularities' that have no basis in fact. Where evidence exists of actual fraud or wrongdoing, it should be submitted in writing to the Bureau of Elections," Benson said.

The state secretary announced on Wednesday that all of Michigan's counties had voted to certify the result of the election, including Wayne County, the state's most populous area, where officials reportedly had two minds about certifying ballots cast due to concerns about malpractice.

Biden won 68 percent of the vote in Wayne County, which includes the city of Detroit and where more than 850,000 ballots were cast.

Benson, who has defended Michigan's electoral process and integrity, said Wayne County "and any other local jurisdictions where the data shows any notable clerical errors" will be included in the audit.

Trump has refused to concede his election defeat to Biden and has filed multiple lawsuits in various states and jurisdictions where votes show he lost, in an attempt to overturn the results.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Will Reveal Choice for US Treasury Secretary Soon

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Joe Biden, the projected winner of the US 2020 presidential election, said that he plans to reveal his choice for the next Treasury Secretary soon.

"You will soon hear my choice on Treasury. I made that decision, we made this decision, and you will hear that even just before or after Thanksgiving," Biden told reporters on Thursday afternoon.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says Not Ruling Out Legal Action Against Trump Admin. Over Hampered Transition

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Presumed US President-Elect Joe Biden said he has not ruled out taking legal action against the Trump administration, including the General Services Administration (GSA), over his hampered transition to power.

"I want to wait and see what happens. I'm not going to rule anything out or anything in," Biden told reporters on Thursday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says He Discussed Nationwide Mask Mandate With State Governors

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Presumed US President-elect Joe Biden said that he discussed with state governors the issue of imposing a nationwide mask mandate.

"We discussed the implementation of a national mask mandate. It is not a political statement, it is a patriotic duty," Biden told reporters on Thursday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says He Does Not Envision National Shutdown Over Coronavirus Pandemic

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Presumed US President-elect Joe Biden vowed on Thursday not to impose a nationwide lockdown due to the novel coronavirus that will hurt the economy, though he pledged to "follow the science" in battling the pandemic.

"I'm not going to shut down the economy, period. I'm going to shut down the virus," Biden told reporters on Thursday.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Judge Rejects Republican Bid to Expand State's Election Audit - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - A US judge in Arizona has dismissed a Republican party lawsuit seeking to expand the state's election audit, a court filing revealed.

"IT IS ORDERED the motions to dismiss, by the Maricopa County defendants and the intervenors Secretary of State Katie Hobbs and Arizona Democratic Party, are granted. The plaintiff's Verified Complaint will be dismissed with prejudice," the court filing said on Thursday. In addition, the court rejected the Arizona Republican party's bid to block the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors from certifying the election results.

President Donald Trump has claimed he won the 2020 election but victory was stolen from him via a massive fraud and acts of impropriety in at least six Democrat-run US states. Trump has subsequently sought audits, recounts and has filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said that they have not found substantial election fraud and irregularities.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Pence Says US COVID-19 Positive Test Rate Doubled in Past Month

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The US COVID-19 test positivity rate has doubled in the past month, Vice President Mike Pence told reporters.

"Cases are rising throughout the country. The positivity [rate] in the last 30 days has risen from an average of 5 percent to 10 percent," Pence said on Thursday.

The Vice President did note that the positivity rate has dropped from a high of 20 percent earlier this year and that the United States is better positioned to confront the virus, citing a 70 percent drop in mortality.

As of Thursday, the John's Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center has logged 11,667,719 COVID-19 infections in the United States and nearly 252,000 disease-related deaths.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Acting US Defense Chief, Uzbek Foreign Minister Reaffirm Security Partnership - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US acting secretary of defense has reaffirmed America's bilateral strategic and security ties with the visiting foreign minister of the former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, the Department of Defense said in a press release.

"Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller met with His Excellency Abdulaziz Kamilov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan to reaffirm the strategic security partnership between the United States and Uzbekistan," the release stated.

Miller welcomed Uzbekistan's efforts to facilitate intra-Afghan peace negotiations, supporting the economic reconstruction of the country, and its integration into the Central Asian region and both leaders restated their commitment to promote the Afghanistan peace process and a lasting political settlement, the Defense Department noted.

Both men "emphasized the importance of further enhancing bilateral military-to-military cooperation and shared their desire to continue close collaboration on issues such as counterterrorism, border security, and defense institutions' capacity building," the release said. Miller also said the United States would continue to support Uzbekistan's' sovereignty and independence and work with the countries of the region to address common security challenges, it added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Health Dept. Authorizes Use of Remdesivir Arthritis Drug Combination to Treat COVID-19

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) – A two-drug combination to treat COVID-19, in which an anti-arthritis drug is combined with the previously approved medication remdesivir, received emergency use authorization, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said in a press release.

"In a clinical trial of hospitalized patients with COVID-19, baricitinib, in combination with remdesivir, was shown to reduce time to recovery within 29 days after initiating treatment compared to patients who received a placebo with remdesivir," the release said on Thursday. Baricitinib is a FDA approved oral medication to treat moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis. The drug was not authorized as a stand-alone treatment for COVID-19, and the two-drug combination continues to be evaluated for safety and effectiveness, the release added. Remdesivir is an FDA-approved intravenous antiviral drug for use in adult and pediatric patients 12 years of age and older and weighing at least about 88 pounds to treat COVID-19 patients requiring hospitalization.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Health Agency Warns Americans Against Thanksgiving Travel Amid COVID-19 Surge

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Americans are advised not to travel during the Thanksgiving holiday and should celebrate at home or use virtual means to reach out to friends and relatives, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in an advisory.

"As cases continue to increase rapidly across the United States, the safest way to celebrate Thanksgiving is to celebrate at home with the people you live with," the advisory said on Thursday. "Travel may increase your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Postponing travel and staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others this year."

Thanksgiving, which traditionally falls on the third Thursday of each November, is one the favorite holidays in the United States with people typically traveling long distances to spend time with their families and other loved ones.

The CDC advisory noted that more than 1 million coronavirus cases have been reported over the last seven days alone.

The CDC said in the advisory that it is urging Americans to wear face masks and practice social distancing wherever possible and is advising hosts of Thanksgiving parties to limit the number of guests regardless of whether the celebrations are indoors or outdoors.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Talks for COVID-19 Relief Bill to Resume Soon - Senate Minority Leader

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Negotiations for a new COVID-19 relief package are likely to resume soon as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell agreed to restart talks that stalled last month, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

"Last night, they've agreed to sit down and the staffs are going to sit down today or tomorrow to try to begin to see if we can get a real good COVID relief bill," Schumer told a news conference on Thursday.

In March, the Democrats and the Republicans agreed to pass the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The measure provided about \$3 trillion in grants and loans to US businesses and paycheck protection to qualifying citizens and permanent residents.

Since, Democrats and Republicans have been locked in a stalemate on a successive package to the CARES Act, disagreeing on the size of the next relief package to the detriment of Americans in need of aid amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The US economy shrank 5 percent in the first quarter and 31.4 percent in the subsequent three months to hand the United States its worst recession ever amid lockdowns and other restrictive measures. However, the economy rebounded 33.1 percent in the third quarter after most businesses reopened beginning in May.

Recent spikes in coronavirus cases have prompted several states to implement new round of lockdowns and restrictive measures.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

California Issues Stay at Home Order Starting Saturday Amid COVID-19 Surge - Governor

WASHINGTON, November 19(Sputnik) - The US state of California will go under another lockdown starting Saturday following a spike in the number of coronavirus cases, Governor Gavin Newsom said in a statement.

"Due to the rise in #COVID19 cases, [California]is issuing a limited Stay at Home Order," Newsom said via Twitter on Thursday. "Non-essential work and gatherings must stop from 10pm-5am in counties in the purple tier."

The order will take effect at 10:00 p.m. EST on Saturday (3:00 a.m. GMT Sunday) and remain in place for one month.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Health Officials Says Fast Development of COVID-19 Vaccine Did Not Compromise Safety

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The rapid development of vaccines in the United States for the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has not created any safety concerns, US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said in a press conference.

"The process of the speed did not compromise at all safety nor did it compromise scientific integrity," Fauci said on Thursday

Fauci said the effectiveness of the two top vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer are extraordinarily impressive.

He also said the US public should double down on health mitigation measures until the vaccine is ready, adding that the most vulnerable individuals will be able to get the vaccine by the end of December.

Vice President Mike Pence said during the press conference that as soon as the Food and Drug Administration approves the vaccines the US government will be ready to distribute them throughout the United States within 24 hours.

German company BioNTech and Pfizer will ask the US on Friday to allow emergency use of their Covid-19 vaccine candidate, the company told CNN earlier.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Biden Says He Has No Plans to Strengthen US Sanctions, Tariffs Imposed on China

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - Presumed US President-elect Joe Biden said during a press conference that he has no plans to strengthen the sanctions and tariffs the United States has imposed on China, but wants to ensure "bright lines" are respected by Beijing.

"This is not about punishing China, it is about making sure China understands they are going to play with other rules," Biden told reporters when asked about possibly imposing new sanctions and tariffs on China.

Biden reiterated his plans for the United States to rejoin the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Paris Climate Accord at the first day of his presidency.

"We have to make sure that the rest of the world and we get together to make sure there are certain bright lines that Chinese understand," Biden said.

Although the results of the November 3 presidential election are yet to be certified, major US media networks have projected that Biden is the winner. Incumbent President Donald Trump has said he is the winner but the victory was stolen from him via massive fraud and acts of impropriety.

Trump has initiated audits and recounts as well as filed lawsuits in state and federal courts to seek redress. Some states have said they did not find substantial evidence of election fraud.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Judge Rules 2,349 Mail-In Ballots in Pennsylvania Invalid Due to Errors - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US Judge Kevin Brobson said in has ruled that 2,349 mail-in ballots cast in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, are invalid because they do not have date marks, a court document revealed.

"This matter is remanded to the Common Pleas Court to issue an order sustaining the Campaign Committee's challenge to the Elections Board's determination and directing the Elections Board to exclude the challenged 2,349 ballots from the certified returns of election for the County of Allegheny under Section 1404 of the Election Code," Bobson said on Thursday. Judge Bobson emphasized that the mail-in votes are invalid as a matter of law.

Major US media outlets projected Democratic nominee Joe Biden to be the winner of the November 3 presidential election. Biden declared victory but so did incumbent President Donald Trump, who said his victory was stolen via massive fraud and impropriety.

The Trump campaign has demanded audits and recounts and has filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some of the states have said they found no substantial evidence of election fraud.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Delays Federal Execution of Orlando Hall - Court Filing

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US judge Tanya Chutkan has delayed the federal execution of Orlando Hall scheduled for Thursday afternoon as he challenges the lethal injection protocol, a court document revealed.

"Plaintiffs motion for a stay of execution will be GRANTED until such time that the court has reconsidered its finding that Plaintiffs failed to show the necessary 'irreparable harm' to warrant enjoining their executions, despite Defendants' violation of the FDCA," Chutkan wrote on Thursday.

Hall is the eighth inmate to be executed since the federal executions resumed in July after a 17-year hiatus.

The most recent federal execution took place on September 24.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Appeals Board Upholds Deportation of 94-Year-Old Nazi Death Camp Guard - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The US Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) has upheld the deportation of a 94-year-old German citizen living in Tennessee for serving as a concentration camp guard as a teenager in World War II, the Department of Justice announced in a press release.

"The BIA has dismissed the appeal of Tennessee resident Friedrich Karl Berger, a German citizen who was ordered removed from the United States earlier this year on the basis of his service in Nazi Germany in 1945 as an armed guard of concentration camp prisoners in the Neuengamme Concentration Camp," the release said on Thursday.

The court found Berger served at a Neuengamme sub-camp near Meppen, Germany, and that the prisoners there included Jews, Poles, Russians, Danes, Dutch, Latvians, French, Italians, and political opponents of the Nazis. The largest groups of prisoners were Russian, Dutch and Polish civilians, the release said.

"Berger's willing service as an armed guard at a Nazi concentration camp cannot be erased and will not be ignored, this case shows that the passage of time will not deter the department from fulfilling the moral imperative of seeking justice for the victims of their heinous crimes," Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian Rabbitt said in the release.

The decision was announced on the eve of Friday's 75th anniversary of the commencement of the Nuremberg trials of the surviving leaders of Nazi Germany, Rabbitt added.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Wrong to Build Military to Defeat China in Pacific Region - Congressman

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The United States is wrong in trying to build a military force in the Western Pacific capable of defeating China in an all-out war, the chairman of the US House Armed Services Committee Adam Smith told an online podcast.

"Our obsession with military competition with China is a mistake," Smith told a Zoom meeting hosted by the Council on Foreign Relations on Thursday. "Building our defense posture to defeat China in an all out war is wrong. ...We should get off this idea that we have to win a war in Asia with China."

However, the United States must maintain a military posture in the Indo-Pacific region capable of deterring China from aggressive activities, Smith continued.

"We have to be strong enough to deter the worst of China's behavior. ... We have to get our stuff together," he said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US State of Georgia Hand Recount of Ballots Will Not Alter Biden Victory - Official

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US state of Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said the hand recount of ballots will not change the outcome of the presidential election.

Projected President-elect Joe Biden won Georgia by 0.3% - nearly 14,000 votes - in the initial tally of the November 3 election, a razor-thin margin that triggered a mandatory recount. "The audit has aligned very close to what we had in election night reporting," Raffensperger told local ABC affiliate WSB-TV. "It's so close, it's not a thimble full of difference."

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Trump Administration Opposes National Lockdown, Closing Schools - Pence

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration does not support another national lockdown because it is not necessary to deal with the novel coronavirus outbreak, Vice President Mike Pence said during a Coronavirus Task Force briefing at the White House. "President Trump has been very clear that we do not support another national lockdown and do not believe it's necessary. We are not calling for a national lockdown and we won't," Pence said on Thursday.

The Coronavirus Task Force members acknowledged there was a surge in the number of people who have tested positive, but noted the United States is far better prepared at present and just weeks away from the launch of the nationwide vaccination.

Pence said that neither the Trump administration nor health experts are in favor of closing schools in response to recent spikes of coronavirus cases.

"We want the American people to know that it is the position of this Task Force, of this administration and of the CDC [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] that we do not need to close our schools," Pence said.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US State of Georgia Hand Recount of Ballots Will Not Alter Biden Victory - Official

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US state of Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said the hand recount of ballots will not change the outcome of the presidential election.

Projected President-elect Joe Biden won Georgia by 0.3% - nearly 14,000 votes - in the initial tally of the November 3 election, a razor-thin margin that triggered a mandatory recount. "The Risk Limiting Audit reaffirmed the outcome of the presidential race in Georgia as originally reported, with Joe Biden leading President Donald Trump in the state," Raffensperger said in a statement on Thursday.

Raffensperger said the audit revealed mistakes made by several counties in the original count, such as not uploading all memory cards.

Georgia is supposed to certify vote count by Friday, per state law.

All US states must have disputes resolved and votes certified by December 8 before electors meet in their respective capitals on December 18 to cast final official votes.

Trump has said he won the election but victory was stolen from him via massive fraud and acts of impropriety by Democrats. Trump has initiated audits and recounts in several states as well as filed lawsuits in state and federal courts. Some states have said they have found no substantial evidence of fraud.

Major US media networks have projected Biden to be the winner of the 2020 presidential election.

This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

REVIEW - Trump Campaign Escalates Efforts to Block Vote Certification in Key Battleground States

WASHINGTON, November 19 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump's campaign has intensified legal efforts to prevent six key battleground states from certifying election results as critical deadlines loom.

Every major US media outlet has already projected Joe Biden as the winner of the November 13 election. Overall, Biden has won 79.6 million votes (51%) to Trump's 73.6 million (47%), as of Thursday evening. However, Americans do not elect their president based on national popular vote, but via a format called the Electoral College which apportions 538 electoral votes across every state. Biden has been projected to capture 306 electoral votes, well above the 270 minimum threshold.

Each state, which has its own internal deadlines, must certify results by the December 8 federal deadline before chosen electors meet on December 14 to formally cast votes.

The Trump campaign in addition to state-specific challenges, has asked the Justice Department to probe Dominion Voting Systems, which they have claimed deleted and reversed votes in Biden's favor.

"As we started investigating... what emerged very quickly is there's not a singular voter fraud in one state," Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani said during a press conference on Thursday. "This pattern repeats itself in a number of states, almost exactly the same pattern, which to any experienced investigator [or] prosecutor would suggest there was a plan from a centralized place to execute these various acts of voter fraud specifically focused on big cities."

PENNSYLVANIA (20 Electoral Votes)

All 67 counties must certify official results by November 23, per state law, in Pennsylvania, which Biden won by 82,100 votes (1.2%). On Thursday, US Judge Kevin Brobson invalidated

2,349 mail-in ballots cast in Allegheny County because they did not have date marks, a court document revealed.

Earlier this week, a judge cast doubt upon the campaign's request to invalidate corrected ballots during a hearing in which Giuliani alleged the Democrats had launched a nationwide conspiracy to steal the election. Trump's lawyer acknowledged that the lawsuit was not about voter fraud but violations of civil liberties. The judge has yet to rule on the case.

On Monday, the state supreme court shot down a lawsuit claiming Republican representatives were kept too far away to observe ballot counting in Philadelphia.

MICHIGAN (16 Electoral Votes)

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said all 83 counties have voted to certify the results of the November 3 election. Next, the Board of State Canvassers meets November 23 to issue final certification. Biden won the state by roughly 155,000 votes (2.8%).

This came after the canvassing board of Wayne County, Michigan's most populous, on Tuesday, was initially unable to certify the results because 2 Republican members of the 4-person panel cited irregularities. However, hours later the board members reached a compromise to overcome the 2-2 partisan deadlock. Then, on Wednesday, the two Republicans tried to rescind their approval, claiming they made the decisions under duress after death threats. They also alleged the state would not conduct a proper post-election audit, which Benson refuted.

Biden won 68% of the vote in Wayne county overall, which includes the city of Detroit, where more than 850,000 ballots were cast. Republicans targeted ballots cast in Detroit specifically, where Biden had garnered 80 percent of the votes.

On Thursday, Trump's legal team said the campaign dropped a court challenge in Michigan because the goal was achieved.

"This morning we are withdrawing our lawsuit in Michigan as a direct result of achieving the relief we sought: to stop the election in Wayne County from being prematurely certified before residents can be assured that every legal vote has been counted and every illegal vote has not been counted," Giuliani said.

Despite dropping the lawsuit, it appears Trump has not given up. The president reportedly invited Michigan lawmakers to the White House for a meeting on Friday. Some Republicans raised the issue of the state legislature intervening to overturn the results in Trump's favor. However, the notion was shot down by Michigan state Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey on Tuesday, according to local media.

GEORGIA (16 Electoral Votes)

Georgia's secretary of state on Thursday announced that a hand recount of votes reaffirmed that Biden was leading Trump. The final count showed Biden winning by 12,780 votes (roughly 0.2% of the total). The state by law is supposed to certify results by Friday (November 20) at 5:00 p.m. EST (10:00 pm. GMT).

Earlier in the day, Giuliani alleged that in the city of Atlanta Republicans were not allowed to inspect the absentee mail-in ballot processing. He added that the campaign has evidence of "numerous double voters", "out-of-state voters" and "specific evidence of intimidation and changes of vote." He said the campaign will file a new lawsuit.

WISCONSIN (10 Electoral Votes)

Biden won Wisconsin by only 20,608 votes (0.6%), which faces a December 1 certification deadline.

On Wednesday, the Trump campaign paid \$3 million for a recount in two counties: Milwaukee and Dane, where Biden won 70% and 75% of the vote, respectively. Biden won the two counties by more than 360,000 votes combined. The president's team alleges that absentee ballots were illegally issued or altered and circumvention of state ID laws. In addition, they cited a suspicious spike in "indefinitely confined" voters.

ARIZONA (11 Electoral Votes)

State law requires all counties to certify votes by November 23 with the final certification by the state set for November 30. Republican lawmakers have tried to delay the certification in a state Biden is expected to win by 10,000 votes (0.3%).

On Thursday, a federal judge in Arizona dismissed a Republican Party lawsuit seeking to expand the state's election audit. This comes after a judge on November 13 rejected a request to recount Phoenix votes that Republicans claimed were improperly rejected. The campaign's lawyers conceded the small number of ballots would not change the outcome.

NEVADA (6 Electoral Votes)

In Nevada, where Biden leads by more than 2% (roughly 34,000 votes), the state law requires certification to be done by November 24. Trump campaign lawyers asked a court to nullify Nevada's election because, they claim, the use of optical scanning to process signatures violated state law and that votes were cast by dead people. A conservative watchdog filed a similar lawsuit, which a judge is expected to hear arguments about on Friday.

